

Sales & Marketing

Expanding emporium

by Jacky Wong



Angus Wai, general manager, human resources department Fairton International Group Ltd
Photo: Wallace Chan

Best practice helps leading fashion retail group build employer brand

Reacting promptly to high staff turnover rates in the buoyant local labour market, a well-established fashion retail company has opted to face the recruitment and retention challenge head on with a range of employee-focused initiatives.

With 53 years of experience in the local retail industry, Fairton International Group Limited is an international fashion brands management company operating high-end fashion stores and premium leather emporiums. The group currently manages 11 renowned brands: Max Mara, MAX&Co., Marina Rinaldi, Sportmax, iBLUES, PennyBlack, Marella, Kookai, Jean Paul Gaultier, Lloyd and Weekend by Max Mara. Its business portfolio also encompasses wholesale and sub-franchise operations in the greater China region.

The group currently employs 2,500 staff across the greater China region, including Hong Kong, Taiwan and mainland China. Angus Wai, general manager, human resources department, Fairton International Group Ltd, explains the simple distinction between Fairton and its counterparts as being its progressive business growth. In particular, three new boutiques are set to open in Macau plus an additional eight on the mainland, six more in Taiwan, and at least three or four in Hong Kong later this year.

Human factors

"Economic growth on the mainland has resulted in a powerful middle-class in China which is set to become the most predominant and dynamic force in the mainland retail market. The 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and the 2010 Shanghai World Expo will only add momentum to this already burgeoning economic dynamism in the retail industry," Mr Wai explains.

Last year, Fairton recorded an impressive 10 per cent growth rate in its total number of employees. This figure will doubtlessly increase once the proposed new stores are open for business. To fill the vacancies, the group is seeking to hire frontline staff in addition to professionals from different strata for the group's brand development, business development, product development, marketing, public relations, merchandising and visual merchandising departments.

Mr Wai says academic qualifications are not an essential requirement. However, proficiency in English and Mandarin is advantageous for applicants for frontline positions. Recruits should also have a pleasant demeanour, strong communication skills, a presentable image, and ideally some experience in select fashion. Aspiring shop managers need at least three years' experience in a supervisory, managerial or coaching capacity in high-end fashion.

Similar to the entire retail industry, Fairton is plagued by issues linked to the recruitment and retention of quality and experienced staff. As such, the group's print recruitment advertisements will also appear online to enhance recruitment and staff referral programmes will be intensified.

"Our staff respect the company's culture and consider us as an employee-friendly institution and so they refer their friends to us. This in turn is effective in overall staff retention," he explains.

In fact, Fairton is one of the very few retail companies providing referral bonuses to staff. Plans to expand the successful referral scheme are underway, extending it from shop level to other echelons of the company.

Professional flair

Regarding staff retention, Mr Wai adds that a more structured training system and employee care initiatives have been introduced to promote Fairton as a favourable platform for staff at all levels to develop long-term career prospects.

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In line with the company's business culture, Mr Wai details the arrangements for every new recruit at Fairton. "Participation in an orientation programme provides an overview of specific brand characteristics and history. To boot, each brand has its own product training scheme as well as on-the-job immersion in stores."

To maximise team spirit and ensure a work-life balance, Fairton recently introduced a variety of staff activities including outings, sports, competitions and special interest classes. Plans are also in the pipeline to organise more social responsibility programmes, encouraging volunteerism among staff to foster a more caring culture, while strengthening bonds between staff and the local community.

As demand for improved customer service continues to soar in the retail market, Mr Wai foresees manifold challenges ahead. "We will continue to prioritise service quality and keep our staff abreast of market trends," he concludes.

LEADING TRENDS

- Staff management aligned with diversified expansion plans
- Effective bonus scheme for staff referrals
- Structured training and staff activities build staff loyalty

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